

A FORTY-WINER IN CALIFORNIA

Interesting Letter Written By
Mr. Peter Tinsley Fifty-
seven Years Ago.

TELLS OF SAN FRANCISCO

Life in the Mines and the Effect
of Surroundings on
Religious Men.

The following interesting letter, telling of the hardships of the forty-winners in California, was written by Mr. Peter Tinsley, who is still living near Forest Hill Park, to Mr. William D. Pemberton, the grandfather of Mr. W. L. Slaughter, who loaned it to The Times-Dispatch, Curtis Creek, Ala., Cal., Oct. 20, 1841. (Revised Nov. 4, 1848, and finished.)

Mr. William D. Pemberton:
Remembered Friend.—Your letter of the 14th of June was received a few days since, and I can assure you it affords me no little pleasure to reply to it, notwithstanding I have nothing of interest to communicate. I am glad that I had the chance of giving you something in my last letter, which induced you to call it "interesting," and am also glad to hear that by some I am thought of enough to call forth the inquiry, "where is he?" etc. As you see by the superscription, I am at "Curtis Creek," and where, say you, in "Curtis Creek." Well, I will endeavor to answer this question, and tell you how I came here.

After leaving Panama on the 21st of April last (or thereabouts, as I cannot remember dates with a great deal of precision) we had a pretty good time at sea until 27th of May, when, in consequence of our getting short of water, we had to make port at Acapulco. Of Acapulco I need say nothing, or only that it is an old place, once much celebrated for its commerce, and now much worse than most persons would think. It was in 1837 visited by an earthquake and nearly destroyed, but the houses which escaped the shock were pulled down and single story houses erected in their place. The fort, which commands the entrance to the harbor, still stands, showing the effects of the shock it then received, as it is now very uneven, having the center much higher than the northern and southern corners, cracked through and through.

Mexicans Stop Pipes.
Having gotten our water on board (with no little difficulty, in consequence of the Mexicans having obstructed the pipes which conducted the water to the city from the mountains during the last few years to prevent an American whaler from getting water), we put to sea, and was once more on "The deep blue sea" on the 1st of June. During the part of our voyage between this place and Cape Saint Lucas, we had nothing very remarkable to happen, but some very severe gales, and a few thunder and lightning. We were then compelled to put into the land again in order to get water and provisions, as we were very high out of both, making the harbor on the afternoon of the 26th of June. This place is very barren in its general appearance, nothing growing except cactus and a kind of grass which appears never and has had life. The cactus here are very large and some very handsome. We here watered our old "brig," laid in about thirty tons of ballast, butchered and jerked some twelve or fourteen head of cattle, and put out to sea on the 1st of July. We then ran out for a few days, and taking towards the land, came very high being wrecked off "Cape Lazaro" on the 19th of July. The captain was (as was usually the case) drunk, and the sand-bars making very far out at this place, we came within a few miles of shore, and the rocky shoals before any of the passengers saw them. The order then came from the first mate, "Ready about." We were then the first time in a dangerous situation, a strong wind blowing us right on towards the shoal and scarcely room for turning, and the old and sturdy craft the surf almost deafening and the spray almost reaching our bows. The passengers, many of them were very much frightened and put on their life preservers, caught hold of pieces of timber, etc., in order to be prepared for the expected "water launch," and happily the time had not yet arrived, and we came round and off as we went. Many of those who looked the stoutest, also looked the palest, whilst many others, but their countenances betrayed them.

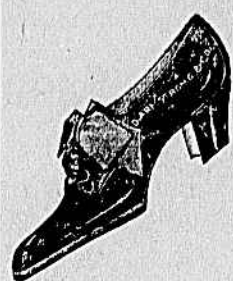
Search for Water.

As for me, I was never before nor have ever since been so alarmed, and indeed, I think if we do not find water we have no great pleasure in life. Having on the 26th of July examined our water, we found that we had very little, and concluded that we must put in for more, entering a place called "San Bartolomeus," latitude 27 minutes, 44 seconds, longitude 115 seconds, at which place we expected to find water, it being an old Spanish mission (as marked on the chart by which the captain was

Dabney & Johnston,

Third and Broad.

Feet Beautifully Shod



Are a source of pleasure. Be the costume never so lovely, unless it is finished and completed by a pair of beautiful, well-fitting, stylish shoes, it is a failure, and you are not well-dressed.

Opinion as to the "correct" thing in a shoe is a matter of environment. The Filipino can get along very well without any, but in our community to be well-shod at this season of the year means the wearing of an elegant pair of Patent Blucher Oxfords—one of the very smartest things in the foot-covering line.

Have you seen them? If not, come in at once.

Another

Of our elegant shoes—a pair of which will make you proud of your feet—at least, those who like something akin to the foot-covering of their gentlemen friends—is our Mannish Blucher Oxfords—a strikingly handsome shoe for those who admire that shape.

These are elegant wearers—comfortable to the feet—a delightful walking shoe. With a pair of these shoes on long strolls in the country can be taken with the satisfaction of knowing that one's feet will not be tired and bruised from the unusual tramp.



There's Nothing Prettier



in the feminine shoe line than our Patent Leather Pumps. The discriminating woman, who desires in her wearing apparel those distinctive touches of correct style and good taste, will be delighted with these pumps.

Space will not permit us to mention every kind and style of ladies beautiful Footwear. Call and be convinced that our stock is unsurpassed in the city.

The Most Remarkable

Feature of these elegant shoes is their cost—prices to suit the purse of every one.

\$2, \$2.50, \$3, \$3.50, \$4.

running), we arrived at this place on the afternoon of Sunday, 29th July. I would have you notice that we made our voyage on Sunday and Cape Saint Lucas also on Sunday. As we had not time on this day to make search for water, we went to work to ascertain how much water we had on board, and found only about 300 gallons and the captain and some of the passengers started to the shore to look for the settlement and see what chance there was for getting water, but soon returned, saying they could see no water, or signs of any human habitation, which they had seen very much. We then concluded that we would divide ourselves in little parties and go in different directions and dig for water, so went all round the bay and sunk several wells, each one as fruitless as the first, giving salt water. On one occasion we thought we had hit upon going to a little ravine where we saw a few staves stuck up in a kind of circle, on which was written "Dig, my hardies, P. S. 1846." At this place we dug manfully for more than an hour, and the result was we came to salt water, as we had done on every other trial. We then went on board and the captain determined to give us one pint of water per day and cook nothing, giving us two cakes of navy bread per day as our meals. This was quite a new thing to us to be on so short an allowance, and this, too, on going out from land to make another port.

Distilled Water.

We then left the place on Thursday, July 31st, for the island of "Corros," latitude 29 seconds 05, longitude 115 seconds 37, though not without making some preparation for distilling salt water, condensing the steam and making a little fresh water in that way. We had no still and had to make a wooden tub to one of the boilers in the gallery and make wooden conductors in place of a worm, using an old tin box covered with wet canvas as a condenser. In this way we could make, by the passengers work-

ing night and day, eight gallons in the twenty-four hours exclusive of the wastage, which would, of course, take place with a machine so incomplete as ours. We, however, made the island of "Corros" on the evening of August 1st. The captain and six or eight of the passengers went ashore, the vessel "lying off and on" until their return; they remained on shore and returned with the sad intelligence that there was no water on the island. We then had to make our way for the nearest port which we could find. This seemed to be the Spanish Mission of San Ramon, which is situated on the coast, latitude 30 minutes 55 seconds, longitude 116 minutes 25 seconds. We had, therefore, in order to keep ourselves alive, to keep our little steam apparatus in continual operation, and as fast as one of our wooden pipes burst, we had to bore out another. Thus we lived on with two cakes of bread per day until the 8th of August, when our bread gave out, and as we had no fresh provisions, we were compelled to take of the little water we had enough to cook us a meal of rice one day and a meal of beans the next. On the morning of the 11th of August, as we were near land, a good many of the passengers petitioned the captain to put them ashore at the little bay just to the southward of the island, "Boadonde." The captain "heaved-to," and the boat was soon filled with those who wanted to be landed, each one taking his share of the water (which was not quite a half-gallon) with some little rice. The boat returned, however, in about four hours with them all, being unable to effect a landing.

Ate a Booby.

We this day caught two or three fish, which were, of course, eaten by their respective owners. I could not succeed in taking a fish, though I caught a bird, a "booby," which I, with one or two others, ate with as much avidity as we could have done had it been a "canvass back" of the Potomac.

"And had it been the dove from Noah's

Returning from her successful search,

which in our way that moment had

chanced to fall,

We would have eat her, olive branch

and all."

We, however, weathered it out and made the port of "San Ramon" on the evening of the 16th of August. I can scarcely call this a port, as it is merely an open roadstead, and not a very safe one, either. We could not come to an anchorage on the afternoon we made the place, but the captain went ashore and found there was plenty of water, came on board drunk, stood out to sea, saying "the tide will run in, and we will be anchored by the morning." The old vessel this day seemed to beat manfully, and at 4 o'clock in the afternoon we again saw the little white flag on shore (the land-mark), and the passengers becoming a little alarmed lest our captain should not wish to come to anchor, again went to him and told him "his vessel should not leave the shore again that night," which very much insulted his little "lordship." He, however, came to an anchorage, and soon had a small caulk of water on board which was soon drunk up than you can imagine. At this place a good many of our passengers left the vessel to go up to San Diego, and there to take the steamer up to San Francisco, and a good many others left with the determination to foot it up the entire distance. The number that left at this place was eighty-three, so this left us some one hundred persons on board. After getting some 1,500 gallons of water and some fresh beef on board, which was all that we could get here in the way of eatables or drinkables, we were off from San Ramon, or, as it is called by many "Aun Dulcor" (which, in Spanish, is "sweet water"), we were off on the evening of 17th August standing out to the west and south until we had reached out nearly to longitude 111 seconds, latitude 29 minutes 43 seconds north, when we tacked and ran landward on the 26th of August, making land at the island of San Miguel on the 1st of September, latitude 34 minutes 17 seconds.

A Fish Story.

As "fish stories" seem to take in the times of "golden excitement," I can tell you one, which, if you do not believe, you cannot disprove. When we were coming out of the port of San Ramon I saw a school of whales, and if I were to tell you there were 500 you might not believe me, but I will not say more than 250, which I do not think an exaggeration, as far as my judgment goes. Of this kind of fishes it has been said and very truly, too:

They like, earth bears not on his spacious

face.

Alone in Nature stands this dauntless

race;

His pastimes like a caldron boil the flood,

The billows feel him as he works his way.

His honry footsteps shine along the sea,

The high-arched wing with white divide the green.

And distant sailors point where he hath

been.

Captain Drunk.

But to my travel. On the 6th of September, as we were rounding Point Conception, there came up a tremendous northwest wind, which blew with so much violence that we were compelled to lay to, and the captain, under water, required all the skill of a sober and cool-headed mariner to manage the vessel, but could you have seen our captain, as drunk as he could be, and the crew more than half-drunk, with our vessel sometimes tossed almost on her beam ends, and the captain under water, you would have said it would have been no pity and nothing wrong to have drowned him as soon as he was sobered enough to know what drowning was. This gale lasted with increasing violence through the night of the 6th and opened on the 7th, more violent than before, so our captain concluded that he could not make the port of Monterey without running more risk than he wished, or than the passengers would submit to, put his vessel "about" to make the port of Santa Barbara, a place which we could have gone to in a few days before. I can assure you I was in favor of going into Santa Barbara or any other place, from which I hoped to leave the old craft, and never trust myself on her again; for in spite of all our convictions of safety and the resolutions to meet whatever might come, and, for a time, the captain's imagination, started by the creaking of the masts, and piling of the winds and the splitting of the sails—for we lost both our mainmast and foremast—would descend to the bottom of the ocean and survey the horrors of such a death as ours, yet the captain, for a time, would not believe in the possibility of such a thing. Therefore, on the evening of the 7th of September, as we were running for Santa Barbara under easy sail, making land on the morning of the 9th at a place some little to the northward of Buena Ventura, and as the walls of the old church came into view, the captain announced it as the walls of the mission of Santa Barbara, made for the anchorage and anchored under the full assurance (as far as a drunken man could be) that he had made the Santa Barbara; but this turned out to be the mission of "Boadonde," which was the nearest chance, had happened to strike.

Buena Ventura is on the coast, some thirty miles from Santa Barbara, so as there was nothing on board our old vessel to eat except beans, our best meat, excepting but a few days, we were in a state of starvation. I am fifty miles of us concluded that as we were ashore and well, we would not bother the captain any more with our presence, but would take our chance up the coast on "shanks' mare" rather than attempt to go around Point Conception again with a drunken captain and an insolent and subordinate crew. Thus on the morning of the 10th of September I left the old brig in company with three others, as companions like, and started for Santa Barbara, then thirty miles distant, and I can assure you that, with the first of us, we were not far from starvation. I felt very willing to stop after we had made twenty-one miles, resting at the house of an old California Spaniard, where I had for the first time since I left home a dinner of vegetables—green peas, new potatoes, pumpkins, squash, corn, and some other things, which I ate with great relish. There were about twenty-three of the boys, who had not been able to get farther than this place, who were all there at breakfast, and such a vegetable breakfast! I am sure you never saw. We, however, having started with the balance of the crowd having gone on the preceding evening. We had to stop at Santa Barbara for two days, in consequence of our feet being very tender, and many of them were very much blistered. Mine were so that I could scarcely march the last day and all of the time. We left Santa Barbara on the evening of the 13th or 14th for San Francisco, passing through the town of San Luis Abasco on the coast (or nearly so, as it is eight miles off), from there to San Miguel, then to John, then to Nativity, leaving Monterey, some thirty miles to the westward, thence to San Jose, and lastly to San Francisco, at which place we arrived on the eve-

ning of 13th September. Just in time to scribble a few lines home before the mail closed. On the morning after my arrival I met Captain Lowrey, of the "Marianna," with Charles Ayres, and a good many acquaintances, all of whom were well and in good spirits. I stopped on board of the Marianne for several nights, until our old brig came in, which she managed to do by some means on the evening of the 5th October, making the trip from Panama in the unaccountable short time of 166 days, or, in other words, making a round trip to that of the one between New York and Liverpool, which is usually made in twenty-five or thirty days. Of my little land trouble I need say nothing except that I was generally very willing to stop when night came, for though I had seen as much "land" for home—he was much more trouble than worth—all things taken in consideration, I had to walk sometimes a mile to carry him to water, and then perhaps walk two miles in the morning before I could find him (for you must remember that it is not in places that you can find plenty of grass and water in California), and when I did find him, he would perhaps have wandered away from the little grass he could have gotten, and gone on the top of the highest hill in the neighborhood, and look as thin as a razor-blade, so I could not ride him some days at all, but would walk until I could get somewhere, when I could get some corn or something to strengthen the creature. Our land travel was not, however, altogether wanting in interest, as I saw what I may never again see, a good many mountains or wild horses or cattle, a great many deer and a good, large flock of antelope.

San Francisco.

Of San Francisco I suppose I need only say the whole town looks like the streets of a large city in the neighborhood of a large fire, which is still burning, boxes, bales, barrels and bags, in the most complete and entire confusion all around the landings and the same confusion and bustle, which is generally seen in a city in the neighborhood of a large and still burning fire, is seen there throughout the city. Labor is very dear, though scarce, as there are a great many persons there who are merely looking around and catching up little jobs in order to get hold of some real money. You would laugh if you could see some of our Virginia lawyers and doctors carrying the hog and wheeling dirt, though they are doing it, he it said to their praise. I worked some little in San Francisco and received one dollar an hour for my labor, which is the usual price for jobbing. I made, however, arrangements for leaving San Francisco, and was off on the morning of 8th October for Stockton, and thence to the place at which my letter is written. I arrived at Stockton on the 13th and put out from there on the 15th for the diggings, passing the "Stanislaus" River on the 18th at Knight's Ferry. This is surely one of the prettiest places I ever saw, and if there was anything in the world to induce a man to settle thereabouts besides the scenery, I should be pleased to do so. The river, which is a natural dam about thirty feet wide, over which the water runs about eight or ten inches in depth. That part of the river which is dammed up appears to be about fifty feet deep, and you can see the fish and salmon for twenty feet beneath the surface, the water is so clear. The mountains here form a most beautiful curve, and would almost induce one to think themselves at Harper's Ferry if they were to be awakened without a knowledge of their whereabouts. I arrived at the diggings on Friday, 8th October, passing through what is called "Old diggings" very early in the morning, and for the first time saw the miners at their work digging and washing dirt in great confusion and apparently in great haste, though I have found that the more a man hurries when he is obtaining gold, the more he makes.

At the Mines.

I there passed a few miles farther, and came to what is called "Wet's new diggings," a place at which they have no water to wash with, packing the dirt on their backs in bags to a creek about a mile to wash it, and it still pays them very well for this trouble. So I suppose when they can get rain enough to form some holes for washing, this will enable them to make a great deal more with less trouble. I got over to my "home" on the evening of the 19th and pitched my little tent, and put things to rights by night. On Saturday and Sunday we looked around a little in order to determine a place to commence operations on Monday morning. There is camping with me at present a Scotchman, who came up in company with me on the same vessel from Panama (and he is surely one of the most particular men in the observation of the Sabbath I ever saw), who amused me very much on the first Sabbath day. I arrived at the diggings all sitting around campfire. I was serving and had been washing. He had been reading his Bible a few minutes, when he laid down the book, observing as he did it, "It's no use; I cannot think of anything but my mine." He is a Scotchman, and he is a very good fellow, much coupled with thoughts of the "morrow," and for the first time I heard him say he could not keep that day as became a Christian. There is a gentleman camping near me who gave me a slight lecture for washing and sewing on the first Sabbath day. I can assure you I was in favor of going into Santa Barbara or any other place, from which I hoped to leave the old craft, and never trust myself on her again; for in spite of all our convictions of safety and the resolutions to meet whatever might come, and, for a time, the captain's imagination, started by the creaking of the masts, and piling of the winds and the splitting of the sails—for we lost both our mainmast and foremast—would descend to the bottom of the ocean and survey the horrors of such a death as ours, yet the captain, for a time, would not believe in the possibility of such a thing. Therefore, on the evening of the 7th of September, as we were running for Santa Barbara under easy sail, making land on the morning of the 9th at a place some little to the northward of Buena Ventura, and as the walls of the old church came into view, the captain announced it as the walls of the mission of Santa Barbara, made for the anchorage and anchored under the full assurance (as far as a drunken man could be) that he had made the Santa Barbara; but this turned out to be the mission of "Boadonde," which was the nearest chance, had happened to strike.

Hard and Rough Work.

As far as I have become acquainted with the mines, I am by no means pleased, and, as I think that if I can make my health, I can make some money here. The work at which one can make the most, and which I have been doing is very much calculated to make one who is weakly, sick, as you are com-



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pelled to work with wet feet all the time, the water frequently rising up to your ankles, while you are stopping to eat dinner. If you have your hole with two or three inches of water in it in the evening, you will have as many feet in it in the morning, which must be taken out before you can set in to work, and the time you get that out, you are pretty wet, now I can tell you. I hope that the water will soon be more plentiful, and thus enable us to work in the dry places and carry our dirt to the creek and wash it. You must remember that when there is plenty of water, there is no "dry diggings," and where the dry diggings are, the water will not rise in the holes. So you see you must work in the water at the one place, or work at a place where there is no water, depending upon the lumps which you can see. The gold is not to be had here for the mere look of the surface, but requires much labor and a great deal of trouble, and if you know any one who is making up his mind to start out here, give him my advice to stay at home. Not that I think there cannot be money made here, but that when he shall have made it he will not have earned it. The time which I have worked here I have not been either lucky or unfortunate, but made what is generally called by miners a good turn-out. My labor has brought me in about an ounce a day since I began, notwithstanding I lost two days on account of my finger. Whilst provisions are worth a mere song in San Francisco, they are here very high, in consequence of the cost of transportation. Pork is worth 65 cents a pound, bread, 63 cents; corn meal, 75 cents; beans or peas, 60 cents. My living (as we do live) cost me about \$2 a day. You can purchase fish, venison at 37 cents a pound, and I can tell you that we have some very fine venison stews sometimes, with the richest kind of dumplings, and it does not go bad. I should not eat anything else if this could be had every day, but the hunters only come in every Saturday evening, and therefore we have fresh meat on Sundays and Mondays generally. I am afraid I shall not be able to make my fortune as early as some expect to make theirs, nor get as easy, but am determined to give the ground a fair shake for it, and if my health should continue good and fortune not frown on me, I must have something for my trouble and travels, and it does not go bad. I should not eat anything else if this could be had every day, but the hunters only come in every Saturday evening, and therefore we have fresh meat on Sundays and Mondays generally. 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